

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.com

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"This year's pheasant numbers are down, but Iowa hunters need to realize that we are still going to be looking at some of the best hunting to be found anywhere in the nation. South Dakota is the only state that will be able to top our harvest."

Todd Bogenschutz, DNR Pheasant Biologist

Pheasant and pheasant hunting photos are available electronically.

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IOWA PHEASANT SEASON OPENS SATURDAY

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

DES MOINES--The count down is on. Opening Day of the 2004 Iowa pheasant season has nearly arrived. From any perspective, the Iowa pheasant opener represents nothing less than the Sporting Event of the Year. With an estimated 130,000 ringneck enthusiasts taking to the fields this Saturday, no other event can stand in its shadow.

There's a good reason why these gaudy, fast flying game birds create such a stir. Of all the outdoor experiences a person can encounter, few thrills compare to the explosive, heart pounding flush of a cackling rooster.

As is the case with all species of upland game birds, pheasant populations are subject to cycles of boom and bust. By now, everyone is aware that this year's bird numbers are down statewide.

"Early on, the conditions for the 2004 spring nesting season looked very favorable. April was drier and warmer than normal which set the stage for some very good pheasant production," said DNR pheasant biologist, Todd Bogenschutz.

Unfortunately, conditions took a turn for the worse as a series of torrential rainfalls began to pummel the state during late May. In many areas, single storm events dropped as much as 5 to 10 inches of rainfall in just three to four hours.

"It was the peak of the nesting season, and as far as pheasants were concerned those rains just couldn't have come at a worse time," said Bogenschutz. "It is likely those downpours destroyed all nests that were located in waterways, road ditches, and filter strips. The abnormally wet weather just prevented a large segment of hens from getting off a successful hatch this year.

"Right now, I'm advising people to keep a clear perspective on current bird numbers," said Bogenschutz. "When opening weekend hunters took to the fields last year, they encountered pheasant populations that were the highest in ten years.

"This year's numbers are down, but the overall index is almost identical to 2002, and pheasant hunters were very satisfied with that season. This year will be more of a return to normal, and bird numbers should still be acceptable to hunters.

Iowa hunters need to realize that we are still going to be looking at some of the best hunting to be found anywhere in the nation. South Dakota is the only state that will be able to top our [Iowa] harvest," said Bogenschutz.

But regardless of how many roosters are actually lurking in your favorite hunting spot, Opening Weekend success will be enhanced or hindered by two additional, make or break factors -- weather conditions and corn harvest.

For upland bird hunters, rain and excessive winds spell disaster. By contrast, fair skies and a light breeze all but guarantee roast pheasant for Sunday dinner. We'll just have to wait and see which weather conditions we get. After all, this is Iowa.

The status of this year's crop harvest is easier to predict. As of Monday, a little less than half of the state's corn was out of the field and in the bin. This is good news for pheasant hunters -- especially those who are Iowa residents and will be tromping the fields for the entire season.

Here's how it lays. Come Saturday's opener, enough corn will have been harvested to make a reasonably good number of birds available to hunters. The other side of the coin is that there is also enough corn left standing to provide tens of thousands of acres of temporary pheasant refuge. As the crop harvest continues, this will insure a dependable supply of naive, haven't been hunted yet, roosters in the weeks ahead.

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[Hold this story until Thursday, Oct. 28]

IOWA PHEASANT SEASON PREVIEW

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Forget the distractions at home or work. Come Saturday morning, 130,000 hunters have pheasants on their minds as they wade into chest high switchgrass or high-step over corn stubble in pursuit of Iowa's favorite game bird.

Even though ill-timed rains washed out a good share of this spring's nesting, wildlife officials still expect a decent season. "Our summer roadside counts were down 34 percent from last year; mostly due to the heavy rain in late May," notes Department of Natural Resources upland game biologist Todd Bogenschutz. "Hunters should still harvest 800 to 900,000 pheasants, though. It's still going to be a pretty good year for us."

Pheasant hunting success has been a mixed bag in the last few years. In 2003, Iowa hunters shot just over a million ringnecks; rebounding still from 2001, when the harvest of 470,000 hit an all time record low. Less than a decade ago, in 1996, hunters bagged 1.4 million pheasants.

The fall outlook reflects rainfall totals from this spring as well as long-term habitat. The best pheasant numbers appear to be in a roughly four county area around and south of Spirit Lake in northwest Iowa and in a band of east central/southeast Iowa from about Grinnell east and southeast, near Iowa City. In western Iowa, some fairly good counts came from the Creston and Atlantic region. Still, Bogenschutz sees hunting success as 'spotty.' "You may hunt some areas and do fairly well, then move ten or 15 miles away and the hunting won't be so good," offers Bogenschutz. "That's probably a reflection of how the rains came this spring."

Early nests lost to rain mean many hens re-nested. While later nests usually yield fewer chicks, it does improve the forecast. Bogenschutz warns, though, that younger roosters might not be fully colored in the first couple weeks of the season. Hunters may have to pass on a shot, if they are not sure if it is a hen, which is illegal to shoot in Iowa.

A major variable for early season hunters, though, will be the crop harvest. "Standing corn always makes early season hunting difficult and the harvest is running behind this year," reminds Bogenschutz. "A lot of the opening weekend hunting success depends on how much came out this week." Figures from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship show just 47 percent of corn acres were harvested by early this week. Soybeans were 95 percent harvested.

That will mean adjustments, but most Iowa hunters are there for the recreational and social aspects, too. And when they hunt, they spend money. "Hunters spend a lot of money, whether they are local or from out of state," observes Terry Little, wildlife

research supervisor for the Iowa DNR. “Most of that is spent in rural areas. Nonresidents spend a lot on trip-related expenses; food, hotel stays, gas; maybe equipment they wait to buy here. Local hunters spend less on trip expenses, but more over the course of the year; gear and equipment.” The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 2001 Recreation Survey estimates Iowa pheasant hunters spent \$53.2 million in '01. As that impact rippled through the economy, the multiplier effect topped out at \$96.9 million. And, since that is from Iowa's record low season, it's safe to assume current spending is up substantially.

But that's the last thing on a hunter's mind as he steps slowly up to where his dog is locked on the red-hot scent of a hidden rooster. The commotion of the flush, the excitement of dropping the bird, and comparing notes at the end of the hunt overshadow 'economic multipliers' and 'sales tax revenue generated.'

Save the dollar signs for Christmas season. There are birds to hunt.

New Blaze Orange Requirement for Upland Hunters

Most hunters wear *some* blaze orange anyway. This year, though, it is required for hunting upland game. Anyone hunting pheasant, quail, ruffed grouse, woodcock, cottontails or jackrabbits must wear at least one external article of clothing; which must be at least 50 percent solid blaze orange in color. Items can include a cap, hat, vest, coat, jacket, sweatshirt, sweater, shirt or coveralls.

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PLAY IT SAFE, PHEASANT HUNTERS URGED

DES MOINES – The number one weekend for hunters is also the number one weekend for unintentional injuries. The Iowa pheasant hunting season begins at 8 a.m. Saturday with an estimated 130,000 hunters heading to the field.

“The first two weeks of pheasant season has the most hunting injuries of any hunting season in Iowa,” said Rod Slings, recreation safety program supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “The excitement of a flushing bird, maybe a little competition among hunters or not knowing where everyone is during the hunt are all factors that make these early weeks the most injury riddled of any of our hunting seasons.”

Slings said hunters need to approach opening weekend with a plan that spells out where every hunter in the group will be and each person's role in the hunt.

“Discussing the hunting plan single best thing hunters can do to avoid injuries. Stay in sight of each other. Know the zone of fire and stay within that zone and be sure to wear plenty of blaze orange,” Slings said.

The blaze orange requirement is new this year for hunters of upland game - pheasants, roughed grouse, quail, Hungarian partridge and woodcock. The new requirement can be fulfilled by wearing a hat, cap, vest coat, jacket, sweatshirt, sweater, shirt or coveralls that are at least 50 percent solid blaze orange.

Anyone born after Jan. 1, 1967 is required to have successfully completed a hunter safety course in order to purchase a hunting license. The DNR investigated 15 injuries in 2003 that occurred while pheasant hunting, compared to five in 2002.

For more information, contact Slings at 515-281-8652, or your local conservation officer.

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HUNTING DOGS READYING FOR PHEASANT OPENER TOO

It's a situation many dog-owning hunters face every fall. Opening weekend of pheasant hunting in Iowa, warm weather, and a four-legged hunting companion is in less than tip-top shape. It can be a recipe for trouble, one that can rack up hundreds of dollars in veterinarian bills, end a pleasant day of hunting, or in extreme cases, sideline a dog for the entire season.

Opening weekend is a busy time for local vets, many of who spend much of their time treating dogs for heat-related stress, broken bones, and other traumas. The number one medical issue Scott Curry, D.V.M., said he sees at the Newton Animal Clinic, especially on opening weekend, is wire cuts. Most of those come from dogs trying to squeeze through barbwire fences. He advised hunters to their dogs through or over the fence. If cuts do occur, Curry recommended cleaning the wound with saline and applying pressure with a gauze pad. In some cases, "skin glues" can be applied to help seal the wound when the bleeding quits.

"You might not be able to keep hunting them, but it might save you some vet bills."

If in doubt, it's best to have the animal checked out by a veterinarian.

Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, is another issue that doesn't always warrant enough attention.

"When they (hunters) go in for lunch, the dogs need to eat too," Curry said.

He advised carrying canned dog food to feed the dog at mid-day. Younger dogs and puppies are even more susceptible, because they tend to “burn it (energy) all off and their bodies aren’t used to cranking it up,” he added.

Water is also critical, especially on these warm, early season days. Most dogs will seek out creeks, streams or ponds to rehydrate and cool off, but it is a good idea to keep some extra water on hand when natural water sources aren’t available. If it does appear the dog is getting overheated, pour cool water over their footpads – that’s where a dog perspires, Curry said. Pour cool water over their coat too, but don’t submerge them.

A dog’s eyes also collect all kinds of debris. Weeds, weed seeds, dust and other particles get in their eyes and causes irritation, discomfort or worse. Keep a bottle of saline solution on hand and rinse their eyes out at lunch and at the end of the hunt, or if conditions warrant additional rinsing. Check with your vet about getting some steroid-free ophthalmic ointment.

Too often, hunters don’t have their dogs in hunting condition when the season starts, and therefore, hunters should watch their dogs closely for signs they have reached their limits. In addition to visible signs of tiredness and soreness, Curry also said hunters should pay close attention to their dog’s paws. If they lick and chew on their pads, and there is no burr or other foreign object lodged between them, that’s a sign the pads are still soft and not in condition. It might be wise to kennel the dog for the rest of the day.

Curry also weighed in on the pre-hunt and post-hunt care of a dog. Although many hunters give small doses of aspirin to their dogs to prevent and relieve pain, Curry said that should be avoided or used very sparingly. There are other pain relief products on the market, he said, that are made for dogs and are easier on the dog’s stomach. If aspirin is used, don’t exceed 10 milligrams per pound and don’t use more than once or twice. In any case, avoid ibuprofen.

“That will tear a dog up,” Curry said.

EMERGENCY CANINE CARE KIT

ESSENTIALS

- Saline
- Gauze
- Tape
- Cotton Balls
- Cotton Swabs
- Triple antibiotic ointment
- Food
- Water
- Skin glue

OTHERS

Sharp scissors for removing burrs (Always cut perpendicular to the skin rather than parallel to avoid the possibility of cutting skin)
Betadine ointment or scrub
Forceps
Toenail clippers
Rectal thermometer

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[electronic photo available]

SURVEY FINDS IOWA TURKEY NUMBERS SLIGHTLY LOWER

CHARITON – Iowa's turkey population remained fairly steady from 2003 to 2004, but heavy spring rains had an impact on poult survival, according to the 2004 Turkey brood survey. The survey found the average number of poults with a hen was lower than last year, and was about 10 percent below the 10-year average.

A late, wet spring throughout much of Iowa was most likely responsible for the decrease in poult production, said Todd Gosselink, forest wildlife research biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

"The broods likely hatched before the heavy rains began, which would explain the increase in the number of hens with broods, but poult survival decreased after the hatch, most likely due to the rains," Gosselink said.

Turkey broods were reported earlier in the spring and poults seen in the early summer months were larger than what is typical for the time of year, which means the hatch was earlier in 2004.

"With all the heavy rains we had during the spring and early summer, the brood survey results were better than I had expected," Gosselink said. "I haven't heard anyone tell me they are having a hard time finding turkeys to hunt in Iowa."

The survey found the highest number of turkeys in southern Iowa, followed by east central and northeast Iowa. The largest increase was in western Iowa.

For more information, contact Gosselink at 641-774-2958.

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[electronic photo available]

IOWA OSPREY RECOVERY ENJOYS RECORD YEAR

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE--The fact that 26 fledglings were successfully released at five separate sites would have been enough to celebrate. Factor in an additional five nesting attempts by wild adult pairs, and there is no denying that it was a watershed summer for the state's osprey recovery effort.

"This was definitely a record year for ospreys in Iowa," said DNR recovery coordinator, Pat Schlarbaum.

"Thanks to the support of raptor and wildlife diversity professionals in Wisconsin and Minnesota, we were able to obtain an extremely robust group of young birds this summer. Once the ospreys arrived in Iowa, our staff of volunteer hack site attendants became very dedicated to the task of caring for the birds, and survivorship was excellent at all five locations. From when the birds arrived on site until they gained complete independence and were obtaining fish for themselves, there was only one known mortality. For a group of that size, it's a really remarkable accomplishment."

Schlarbaum noted that volunteer support from the public sector has been a crucial component of Iowa's osprey recovery effort. This summer's first time release attempt at Clear Lake's Regular Baptist Camp was a good example of just how energized and committed a volunteer force can become. At this site, volunteer workers raised funds and acquired material donations to erect the huge, tree house-style hack site needed to temporarily house five young birds. Additional volunteers came forward to provide the \$2,500 needed to locate, obtain, and bring the ospreys to Iowa. Volunteers faithfully provided daily handouts of fresh fish during the two weeks the newly arrived raptors were confined inside the hack box. Once the fledglings were liberated, daily feedings continued for an additional month while the fish hawks honed their hunting skills.

"There's no question that there has been a huge outlay of time and energy on the part of a lot of people on this project," said Clear Lake Osprey Coordinator, Nelson Crabb.

"But for me and everyone else involved, the success of this effort has been more than gratifying. These ospreys are just a huge and magnificent raptor, and we're hoping to provide future generations with an opportunity to observe this species in its natural setting. They're just an incredible bird and are something that everyone will be able to enjoy. I think this project has made everyone involved feel like a real contributor to something good."

Clear Lake ospreys provided unprecedented regional, as well as statewide, viewing opportunities due to the unique donation of an Earth-Cam provided by the CL Tel Company. As soon as the young ospreys were placed into the hack box, they gained an immediate and wide following as hundreds of North Iowans viewed the young birds' daily activities on their local TV screens [CL Vision - Channel 2] or by logging onto the CL Tel web site. Once the young ospreys were on the wing, the Earth Cam was moved

to the hack site rooftop where it provided an outside view as the liberated ospreys returned to feed.

"I've had people tell me that they're so hooked on viewing the ospreys, that it's the only thing they watch before going to work in the morning. No news, no weather, nothing -- just ospreys," said Crabb.

"This recovery attempt has been very experimental, and so far everything has fallen into place. To be able to see these birds flying free, and coming in with fish they've just caught for themselves makes everyone's efforts seem extremely worthwhile. It's all been very overwhelming. They're just an amazing bird."

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IOWA FORESTLAND ACRES INCREASE; OAK FOREST ACRES CONTINUE TO DECLINE

The recently released US Forest Service forest inventory data had mixed news for Iowa. The good news is that Iowa's forested acres reached 2.7 million in 2003 – the most since 1954. The bad news is that even though there was an increase in forested acres, the number of acres of oak forest has continued to decline.

"The comeback of Iowa's forested acres has really been amazing when you consider that we have gained over one million acres in just thirty years," said Paul Tauke, forestry supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. He said much of the increase is due to changes in the cattle industry.

"In the late 1970s, Iowa's cattle industry contracted, resulting in fewer cattle grazing Iowa's pastures and woodlands. Without the cattle eating and trampling young tree seedlings, these areas have converted back to woodland," he said.

But this increase in forested acres has not included an increase in the acres of oak forests.

The 2003 inventory data showed only 933,000 acres of oak remain in the state, down nearly 300,000 acres since 1954. On average, Iowa has lost about 5,800 acres of oak annually since 1954. Historically oak-hickory forests have made up the largest single forest type throughout the state. If current trends continue, a combination of mixed upland hardwood and maple basswood forests will eclipse oak as the predominant forest type in the state. Within the next 15 to 20 years the oak, Iowa's state tree, will no longer be the king of the woods.

The loss of acres is primarily due to the lack of forest management practices to regenerate and perpetuate oak forests. According to Tauke, most woodland owners do not

realize their forests need to be actively managed. This neglect is responsible for the continuing loss of oak forests.

Oak forests need to be managed because oak seedlings will not survive in the shade of other trees, while species such as hard maple, ironwood, bitternut hickory and elm are very tolerant of shade. Prior to eastern-European settlement prairie fires swept into woodland areas eliminated or reduced shade tolerant species within the woods and gave oak a competitive advantage. When Iowa's fire disturbance cycle was broken and the fire driven ecosystem was replaced with agriculture, oaks were in a position to dominate many woodland sites. These sites eventually grew up to be today's oak forests and it is these sites that are now converting to shade tolerant mixed hardwoods. In the absence of disturbance, when larger oak trees are harvested or die, the smaller shade tolerant trees occupying the forest's mid-layer and floor layer take over and eventually become the dominant trees in the forest.

Iowa foresters are concerned about the steady loss of oak woodlands because oak trees provide a number of benefits. Oak acorns feed deer, turkey, squirrels, blue jays and other wildlife. Oak forests provide cover and roosting habitat for wildlife. Oak logs are highly prized around the world for furniture, cabinets and veneer. The oak forest ecosystem is home to dozens of species of woodland wildflowers and forbs which stabilize hillsides and improve our water quality.

"If the oak resource continues to shrink there will be significant negative impact on our wildlife populations, our water quality, and our economy. I would also expect an increase in crop damage as acorn dependent wildlife species seek other food sources to supplement their diet," Tauke said.

The positive news is that it is not too late to reverse the trend, but it will take action and the application of scientific based forest management principles that reintroduce disturbance into Iowa woodlands.

"Perpetuating oak forests will take a commitment from our woodland owners. It may also take the political realization that oak forests provide societal benefits that extend beyond the borders of the woodlot and that society, as well as the individual landowner, need to invest in that future oak forest," Tauke said.

To get assistance in assessing and stewarding your forest resources contact your Iowa DNR District Forester. To locate your forester on the web, log on to www.iowadnr.com/forestry/district.html or call 515/242-6898.

If you wish to start an oak forest using seedlings, contact the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477 or order on the web at www.iowadnr.com/forestry/.

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